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# Time, rhythm and the creative economy

Phil Jones<sup>1</sup> and Saskia Warren<sup>2</sup>

Creative practice is fetishised in the policy discourse of post-industrial economies as a driver of growth and social inclusion. Conceptually, we advance Lefebvre's incomplete rhythmanalysis project by combining the ideas of dressage and arrhythmia to give novel insights into contradictions within the contemporary creative economy. Our analysis shows dressage (practices learned through repetition) being used as a means to impose unsustainable ('arrhythmic') patterns of working within the creative sector. Cultural intermediaries, practitioners whose work focuses on engaging communities with the benefits of the creative economy, are today finding themselves chasing short-term, bureaucratic demands on their time, which operate counter to the rhythms of creative production. This paper draws on interviews and activity diaries kept by intermediaries collected as part of a large AHRC-funded project. We conclude that the rhythmic regimes being imposed on intermediaries by policymakers and funders are in fact driving out the very creative practices they are intended to foster. This contradiction has major implications for growth, social inclusion and wellbeing in an age of neoliberal austerity.

**Key words** rhythmanalysis; time; cultural intermediaries; creative economy; activity diaries; UK

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## Introduction

EP Thompson (1967) discussed the rise of clock-based time as a key tool for regulating the bodies of workers as Britain industrialised in the 18th and 19th centuries. The clock made it easier to equate time with money. Thompson's is a nuanced account, arguing that despite the dominance of the clock, older modes of task-based, rhythmic, 'natural'<sup>1</sup> time still persisted in the post-war employment landscape, for example among dock workers, writers, artists, farmers and students. Nonetheless, Thompson credited clock-based discipline with unleashing 'the insistent energies of industrial man' (p 93). Today, even in post-industrial economies, clock time has become indelibly associated with the capitalist urge to maximise production (Reisch 2001).

Thompson justified regulation through clock time as enabling capitalist productivity. There is, however, a temptation to represent clock time as inherently repressive and capitalist, while positioning rhythmic time as creative and resistant. As we outline below, rhythmic time can also be used as a repressive mechanism for regulating the behaviour of workers. What we argue here, however, is that far from generating greater productive capacity, attempts to maximise productivity through imposing rhythms can actually have the opposite effect.

Creativity has become a key motif of post-industrial economies, with the creative and cultural industries seen as key to the recovery of declining regions. Indeed, writers like Florida (2002) have even gone so far as to declare creative workers as a separate 'class' that must be attracted to drive cities' economic productivity. Bourdieu (1984) suggested that journalists and other actors who advised the French middle classes on the kinds of culture they should consume could be termed 'cultural intermediaries'. In more recent years this category has been widened to include a diverse group of artists, creative practitioners and those within the cultural sector who work, in different ways, to engage communities with creative activity. This intermediation activity can stretch from attracting new audiences for galleries and performances to getting individuals more actively involved in creative production (Smith Maguire and Matthews 2013).

Drawing on material from a large Research Council-funded project, we report on the activities of intermediaries in the cultural and creative sector whose work includes elements of community engagement. The findings we present here have major significance for debates in geography and beyond, both conceptually and in application. Conceptually, we challenge implicit assumptions underlying Lefebvre's unfinished rhythm-analysis project by arguing that rhythms are every bit as

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potentially repressive as clock time when it comes to dictating how people live their lives. In terms of application, the broader significance of this paper is in how these conceptual insights build our understanding of major geographical and societal issues around economic growth, wellbeing and social inclusion shaped by the operation of the creative economy.

The arts funding landscape imposes short-term, bureaucratic and measurable working rhythms on the creative sector that do not fit with longer term, creative and productive rhythms. As part of our analysis we develop Lefebvre's (2004) ideas of *arrhythmia* and *dressage*. We thus argue that the rhythms of the funding landscape impose, through dressage, damaging arrhythmias onto creative patterns of working. Lefebvre suggested that dressage – learned behaviours through repeated activities – could be creatively liberating. Contra Lefebvre, we argue that processes of dressage are, in Sharma's (2014) terms, *recalibrating* the creative body. Practitioners are having to alter their working patterns, learning to spend less of their time on (capitalistically productive) creative undertakings and more on routine, bureaucratic activities. In a neoliberal economy that fetishises creativity as the key to unlocking growth, the way rhythm is being deployed to manage the creative economy is, in short, killing the goose that lays the golden eggs.

We start here by exploring how the management of time has been used to regulate and discipline working patterns before outlining in more detail Lefebvre's ideas around rhythm. The next section of the paper explores how cultural intermediaries are managing the rhythms being imposed on them and the implications for their working practices. We conclude that, far from being abstract concepts, arrhythmia and dressage give critical insights into contradictions within contemporary capitalism. The paradoxical result of how time is being regulated for those intermediaries seeking to get more people engaged with the creative and cultural economy is that their activities – and by extension the wider economy – are actually made less productive.

## Time as discipline

Sharma (2014) usefully problematises the different modes of time-based discipline that co-exist in western economies, analysing the biopolitical potential of time as a regulating mechanism imposed on the contemporary working body. She develops the notion of *power-chronography* for exploring the lived experience of time, arguing that contemporary attempts to control and regulate time to an ever greater degree makes the individual body 'more vulnerable to biopolitical control' (2014, 17). She suggests that individuals are trained in shifting between different speeds of life

operating in different circumstances and that *recalibrating* to these speeds is a key way in which control through time is internalised by individuals. As we will see below, this notion of recalibration has significant parallels with Lefebvre's notion of dressage.

Sharma's case studies are particularly illuminating as they explore the ways in which an individual's time practices shape and are shaped by the time practices of others. Thus, looking at frequent business travellers, a framework of spa services, gadgets, taxis, security personnel and stimulant drugs such as modafinil recalibrate the travelling body, enabling it to function at a high level despite tiredness and temporal dislocation. Those with less power – working in low-level service jobs – are *also* required to recalibrate their bodies in order to fit with the time worlds of the travelling elite, working anti-social hours to ensure the business traveller can be driven around town, check into a hotel, order a sandwich and a host of other activities at 3 am.

The theme that comes out very strongly in Sharma's work is the way that bodies are recalibrated to different types of time in order to serve the needs of global capitalism. The yoga practitioners that she studies, for example, are being deployed in office spaces to counter the physical and emotional pressures that contemporary modes of work bring. While some yoga practices might emphasise moments outside of time, workplace yoga complements a discourse that suggests the physical and psychological pressures of being in work must be accepted and managed rather than challenged. Although there are a wide variety of yoga practices and beliefs, the purpose of workplace yoga – as marketed to employers – is to keep the worker at their desk for longer. Indeed, Sharma's damning conclusion is that '[f]ar from indicating a culture of wellness, [workplace] yoga is an example of extreme alienation cast as enlightened empowerment' (2014, 104).

The biopolitical imposition of capitalist regimes to maximise productivity onto individual bodies via the regulation of time has been referred to by Freeman (2010) as *chrononormativity*. The manipulation of time via schedules, calendars, watches is made to seem natural and inevitable while at the same time reinforcing asymmetrical power hierarchies. The purpose is to bring the bodies of individuals into sync, which not only fosters productivity but also the sense that these collective times are natural – thus naturalising the power asymmetries as well. Freeman sees this not just in clock time, but also in the ways that marriage, accumulation of wealth, reproduction and childrearing are constructed as inevitable rhythms within the lifecourse – implying, of course, that bodies outside these rhythms can be considered abject. The regulation of time can thus be seen as marking *any attempt* to resist capitalism as abject.

This is of particular interest in relation to a well-established discourse that explores the leakage of capitalist control through time beyond the boundaries of the eight-hour working day that characterised high modernity (Nowotny 1994). Some of this leakage has been driven by changes to information technology that have meant workers can be permanently connected and contactable. Following Freeman's ideas on chrononormativity, however, this sense of being on standby to serve work needs at any moment has become increasingly normalised for a certain class of workers – particularly in the creative economy as we explore below. Indeed, a lack of connectivity is seen as abject – an assumption that underpins ongoing discourses about lack of broadband and mobile connectivity in rural areas acting as a barrier to economic development (Roberts and Townsend 2015). Thus the clock becomes a less meaningful tool for discipline since workers should *always* be available and therefore always potentially working.

### Rhythmanalysis, dressage and arrhythmia

Although not discussing rhythmic time explicitly, the cases related by Sharma above highlight that the temporal can act as a major tool for discipline beyond the constraints of a standardised working day regulated by the clock. An early example exploring the power of rhythms in regulating everyday life is Walter Ruttmann's (1927) *Symphony of a city*. Posing as a documentary tracing a day in the life of Berlin, the rhythms of the city, night and day, work and play are depicted as having creative qualities, though highly regulated and controlled. The film makes clear that urban rhythms are multiple and overlapping but can also sometimes come into conflict – a suicide forming the film's emotional high point.

Much of the interest in notions of rhythm within Anglophone geography has emerged since the English translation of Henri Lefebvre's incomplete work on rhythmanalysis was published in 2004. While he can be criticised for not explaining how to *do* rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre does offer a conceptual frame for thinking about rhythm. In a lyrical account reflecting on the view from the balcony of his Paris apartment the 'multiplicity of noises, murmurs, rhythms' come together into something like a harmony (Lefebvre 2004, 28). Different rhythmic types are identified: the cyclical rhythms of children going to school, the alternating rhythms of traffic, bistro customers, employees. Like Ruttmann, Lefebvre sees the city as a set of overlapping rhythms (it operates 'polyrhythmically' to use his terminology). This raises questions, however, about the nature of those rhythms.

Two linked concepts from rhythmanalysis are crucial to our analysis in this paper: dressage and arrhythmia.

In conceptualising *dressage*, Lefebvre talks about how animals are broken in to certain patterns of working behaviour (2004, 39). These behaviours are learned through repetition, reinforced through punishment and reward; this cycle of repetition does, however, allow for change. Edensor (2012, 5) suggests that dressage brings with it not merely conformity, but also the possibility to improvise and remake identities. Dressage can thus be thought of in terms of how rhythms create modes of behaviour that can be easily slipped into with relatively little thought. In humans this could be a learned bodily behaviour such as operating a machine, dancing (Hensley 2012), cycling (Spinney 2012) and so on; alternatively it could be a set of habits such as the rhythms of coffee, email, meetings and so on in the post-industrial workplace (Begole *et al.* 2003). Routine, yet different each time. As a concept, dressage appears somewhat less negatively conceived than Sharma's *recalibration*, since engaging with this rhythmic transformation of the body can be creative rather than biopolitically repressive. Metcalfe and Game (2010), for example, examine the everyday routine of the cellist Pablo Casals, who started each day of his life playing several pieces by Bach. Casals reported that the music felt differently each day, that newness could emerge from this repetition in the moment of performance. We suggest below, however, that dressage can also have the unintentional effect of constraining and even stifling creativity because it can be used as a means of imposing arrhythmic modes of behaviour onto individuals.

For Lefebvre the normal condition of the multiple overlapping rhythms of the body and urban life is to be eurhythmic – that they can co-exist if not necessarily come into harmony. If we look purely at the scale of the body, the rhythms of eating, sleeping, breathing, the heartbeat and so on are different, but come together eurhythmically to allow the individual body to function. The co-existence of rhythms, however, as *Symphony of a city* also suggests, brings the possibility of discord. Lefebvre used the term *arrhythmia* to describe rhythms that do not merely clash, but actively damage each other, suggesting this was a pathological situation (Lefebvre 2004, 67). His proposed cure for this pathology was to try to institute new rhythms that return the system to a eurhythmic condition.

Craig Meadows' (2012) reading of insomnia in *Withnail and I* explores this pathology of arrhythmia. The film's central characters Withnail and Marwood live outside the rhythms of 'normal' London society in a haze of sleep deprivation and drug taking. They seek to escape the oppressive arrhythmia of their lives in the city by fleeing to a remote country cottage. On one level this can be read as the conventional fantasy of return-to-nature as cure for the stresses of urban modernity. More than this, however, the retreat can be seen as a rhythmic intervention, attempting to shock

the pathologised arrhythmic system back into some kind of eurhythmia. Interestingly, Lefebvre explicitly suggested that the state (ambiguously defined) should take a leading role in restoring eurhythmia because it has the power to manipulate time, in part through mobilisation, both political and military. As we discuss below, however, in our case study the state has been complicit in creating a counterproductive arrhythmia within the creative sector, particularly through the ways in which arts and cultural funds are administered.

Simpson (2008, 2012) argues that rhythms are neither internal nor external to the body, but are folded through it. His work is interesting in terms of the arguments we make here because he explores some of the tensions between creative practice and polyrhythmia within the city. Simpson acknowledges the disruptive *potential* of arrhythmia, examining attempts by a street magician to woo an audience into paying attention to a performance that comes into conflict with other rhythms on the street – shoppers, tour buses and so on (Simpson 2012). Nonetheless, Simpson (2008) offers observations on how the arrhythmic potential of an impending rain shower is enfolded with a sense of anxiety within the body of the performer. This, he argues, enhances the performance through enhancing the capacity of the performer to act – the nervous tension adding a frisson to the routine. In this case, however, it is the possibility/anticipation of arrhythmia that adds to the creative performance, rather than the potentially damaging arrhythmia itself. This is a point to which we return in the discussion.

In sum, Lefebvre acknowledges that rhythms may be damaging in certain circumstances, but his analysis is underpinned by the optimistic idea that interventions will be aimed at producing harmonious eurhythmias. We argue that much greater attention needs to be paid to the destructive qualities of rhythm because, far from seeking to shock arrhythmic systems back into eurhythmic modes of working, the contemporary world is increasingly seeing dressage deployed to impose harmful rhythms. One of the clearest examples of these damaging arrhythmias can be seen in the creative and cultural sector where, instead of the clock time used in the factory, rhythm is the key mechanism regulating the lives of its workers.

## Rhythms of the creative economy

The work of scholars such as Florida (2002) and Landry (2000) has become attractive to policymakers – if second or third hand – as offering a route out of economic stagnation and unemployment caused by the decline of manufacturing. Florida has posited the existence of a ‘creative class’ that generates wealth in the economy through various kinds of creative and knowledge-based activity in a wide range of professions

including IT, academia, architecture, design, engineering and the arts. He argues that this kind of creative activity is qualitatively different to the routinised, mechanised production of the manufacturing worker and as such the ways in which workers deploy their time can also be thought of differently to the clock time calculability of the factory shift. The importance of the creative and cultural industries is now well entrenched in policy documents across the globe (Prince 2014), even being seen as a valuable tool in development (UNESCO 2013). Creativity and growth are thus seen as going hand-in-hand.

This paper is based on materials collected as part of a much larger project looking at the ways in which professionals working within the creative and cultural sector act as ‘intermediaries’ seeking to engage communities with the wider creative economy (see, for example, Perry *et al.* 2015; Warren and Jones 2015). This engagement is seen as part of a broader process of upskilling to help reduce social exclusion and further drive growth. Within a project interested in questions of time there is a temptation to turn to quantitative techniques to measure the hours, minutes, seconds spent on each task. We resisted this approach because it would put an emphasis on measurable, clock-time, where we were more interested in the *felt* experience of time, which Nowotny (1994) has referred to as *eigenzeit*. A qualitative approach also seemed more appropriate for exploring the activities of workers who are not regulated by conventional clock time, but rather by a flexible set of rhythms. A mixture of conventional and video interviews was undertaken with intermediaries working in the creative and cultural sector across Birmingham and Greater Manchester, reflecting on both past and present activity – one group of interviewees were specifically recruited for their ability to take a longer view, having worked in the sector since the 1970s. In addition, a group of 20 intermediaries were paid to keep activity diaries for a period of four weeks and attend two focus groups in the autumn of 2013 to give insights into the everyday banalities of work in the sector (Perry *et al.* 2015). Participants in the diary keeping were selected whose work explicitly seeks to engage diverse or marginalised communities with creative and cultural activity. As such their activities can be seen as partially complicit with a policy agenda that promotes increasing participation in the creative economy as essential for maintaining growth while claiming that it can reduce structural inequality (Belfiore 2002).

## Thinking longer term

There is a fairly well-established literature indicating that creative work can require a significant period of incubation, whether this be developing and refining ideas (Bilton 2014; Lubart 2001; Olton and Johnson



1976; Smith *et al.* 1995; Weisberg 1993), delivering quality outputs or building relationships with funders, collaborators, volunteers and audiences (Thornham 2014; Walker and Scott-Melnyk 2001; Warren 2014). A recurring theme among our participants was the difficulty in undertaking this longer term work because modes of working in the creative sector are increasingly out of sync with thinking at this timescale. We should note, however, that competing rhythms working against long-term project development is not a new problem for cultural organisations. One interviewee recounted the history of Ten-8, a photography magazine that operated c. 1979–1993. His version of events makes clear that one of the key funders, the Arts Council, was ill-equipped to deal with the rhythms of the publishing industry operating at the time. During the 1980s, Ten-8 sought to move to a subscription-based model. Building on best practice in the sector, their business plan for moving to subscriptions was based on the assumption that it would take five years to become sustainable. The Arts Council scheme under which they sought funds demanded returns within three years and the proposed business plan was therefore summarily rejected. Thus an opportunity to create a more sustainable model of funding for the magazine was lost because of a clash between the rhythms of arts funding and that of the publishing sector (Derek Bishton,<sup>2</sup> video interview 2012).

This historical example aside, there is a real sense from participants that the rhythms to which they are being asked to work today are out of line with their creative ambitions and that this problem has been getting worse in recent years. Part of this is due to the fact that organisations like Ten-8 were working in a public-sector funding climate that was considerably more benign than that which operates in the UK today. Things have clearly become much harder in the cultural sector since the 2008 financial crisis and particularly in the UK since the change of government in 2010, with its ‘austerity’ discourse underpinning savage public-spending reductions:

If we had not had the cuts from the Arts Council and the city council we could have kept a staff member on and we could have worked in a way that meant that we were not so frantic. That is how it feels at the minute, that everyone is just really working to the bone. That said, at least we are still getting the work done. (Charles, audio interview 2012)

The optimistic end to this quote fits with a neoliberal productive myth of doing ‘more with less’, but in reality reflects the extent to which organisations are having to ask their employees to adopt unsustainable working patterns to keep projects afloat, increasing the chances of burnout. (As an anecdotal aside, it is perhaps worth noting that Charles had an extended period of sick leave at the end of 2014 into early 2015). In 2002 Andy

Pratt (cited in Gill 2013) talked about creative workers adopting ‘bulimic’ work patterns, with periods of intense work, alternated with fallow periods. Gill argues that in the decade since Pratt was writing, increasing pressures on staff in the sector have meant that ‘[a]ll the time is “crunch time” now’ (2013, 15), with no quieter moments. This increases the likelihood of workers suffering from stress and anxiety because short-term pressures have become the long-term norm.

Building long-term strategies involves developing working relationships with actual and potential collaborators. A great deal of the activity recorded in the participant diaries was meetings with third parties attempting to think through projects and design activity:

I next met with [collaborator name] at Cherry Reds Cafe in town to discuss [project name] with her further. This was a great meeting with lots of thoughts and ideas on how the workshops will work at the school. (As well as food for thought on budgeting and logistics!) Following the meeting I returned to the office to digest all that was discussed and to review the budget and schedule; this took up most of my time that day as anticipated but gladly since this is definitely a huge priority at the moment. (Jill, diary entry, 7/11/13)

Jill clearly was able to find room in her day for thinking through the practicalities of how the project would work, but interestingly justified this in terms of it being an immediate priority. In a focus group reflecting on the process of keeping an activity diary for this research project, she subsequently commented that she found it hard to flag up the activities that she considered to be of the most importance when writing about her day-to-day routines. Indeed, she noted that she found it hard to justify and judge the value of activity where the pay-off was not immediate (focus group notes, 10 December 2013).

There was a clear recognition among some participants that too narrow a focus on day-to-day activities was damaging the sector by constraining the ability to look to longer term strategic concerns. A senior and experienced arts administrator in Birmingham, Anita commented that:

And I think that . . . one of the greatest achievements for the arts and the reason why we’ve moved forward is that the arts institutions themselves have found a way of working together. So all of our chief execs of the arts bodies meet together regularly and they’ve formed a large partnership that goes forward so there’s not just competing for money they’re actually thinking about the greater vision. (Anita Bhalla, video interview 2012)

These regular meetings at the chief executive level can be read as an attempt to sync the rhythms of larger arts organisations, seeking to establish a eurhythmia in harmony with the post-austerity funding landscape. This enacts a resistance to the kinds of arrhythmias that are coming to typify work within the creative sector. A

similar resistance to arrhythmic patterns of working can be seen in the actions of some individual artists:

I have always gone to seek my own funding or self-fund where possible because the hoops and barriers that you have to kind of go through, especially these days, I am not really kind of too happy with that and also it can stop an awful lot of people from progressing. You know people say well you know we don't have any funding for this so we can't do that and I always say well you can because you know you have got your feet and your travel is quite cheap these days realistically so funding is a thing which I have not really kind of been seeking. (Pogus Caesar, video interview 2012)

Of course, this can be read as a slightly utopian vision (and a creative spin on the classic 'get on your bike') from a well-established artist who is not necessarily frantically scrabbling around for the next piece of project funding to sustain an organisation. Pogus was not alone, however, in suggesting that the demands placed by public funding had got to the point where it was almost not worth trying to secure it – a point we return to below.

For those smaller organisations with a social mission to get communities more engaged with arts and culture, it is, however, clearly becoming more difficult to bring the different demands on their time into a productive eurhythmia. This was reflected on by Noel, who served as a representative for the independent arts sector on a board set up by the Local Enterprise Partnership to develop the region's creative economy:

most people in the sector are not earning the level of salary that they can afford to subsidise their time in those sort of networks. So, it is a constant balancing act because of course in terms of developing business and finding opportunities it is very important to be having those conversations and be networked, but you just have to make that constant judgement call about how much time you're going to put into business development ... (Noel Dunne, audio interview 2012)

In many ways there is no shortage of initiatives to try to enhance medium- and longer term strategic working and business development within the cultural and creative sector. The problem is in finding (unpaid) time in busy schedules for this more strategic work. This is perhaps indicated by the fact that there are precious few reflections within the participant diaries of creative moments that do not have an immediate instrumental purpose. In one such rare vignette, Sally wrote about taking a break from setting up a project so that she and colleagues could undertake a playful intervention in a park next to the arts centre they were working in:

Today I prefer less talking and more absorbing of atmosphere. It is melancholic today as there is scant sun, low hung over cloud, drizzle, though the stark contrast of recently discarded, bright leaves brings a different timbre to the day.

This walk was a good, slower space than I ever have – a place to reflect, listen, observe without problem solving. (Sally, diary entry, 8/11/13)

Sally's diary entries are a mix of lyrical reflection and hard-headed project management. What is striking, however, is the extent to which the 'slower space' of reflection and the opportunity for more creative thinking that she describes above are highly restricted. Writing about a Friday booked off for a workshop retreat she commented that

this isn't a business day – it's a re-charge time, having a bit of time out to think and act differently with people I'm not employing or focussed on consulting formally or informally. Priorities:– The priority was to have some time out – though I still have the guilts about not helping with [ongoing exhibition] – though this was agreed months ago with the whole team – I should have been born a Catholic. (Sally, diary entry, 8/11/13)

Sally here acknowledges the need to address the danger of slipping into a pathological set of rhythms – this particular day had long been set aside to reset her working patterns in an attempt to establish eurhythmia. Nonetheless the idea of taking a day off to 'think and act differently' generated feelings of guilt and of letting the team down by not helping with routine work during a time of pressure. The business of being creative – supposedly the core concern of Florida's creative class – is being squeezed out by the banal, but insistent, everyday demands of actually keeping creative enterprises ticking over in a hostile funding climate.

### *Dominance of the routine*

It is this tendency toward devaluing the longer term creative goals in favour of the *routine* and bureaucratic that sits at the heart of the concerns raised by the case study presented here. The pressure to deliver on the immediate and calculable can be seen as a kind of dressage. Longer term plans and short-term demands seem to be operating arrhythmically, forcing creative workers to adopt coping strategies where they deprioritise longer term work in favour of reacting to immediate demands imposed externally.

The solicited diaries highlight the wide variety of tasks that participants were performing within their jobs, all of which operate with different rhythms. The challenge is to find ways of folding these different rhythms into the bodily everyday without establishing unsustainably arrhythmic patterns of working. Tasks undertaken by participants stretched from creative practice, project management and grant writing, through meetings, administration and even relatively unskilled chores such as cleaning and selling tickets/refreshments.

This typifies my experience of working for other small arts organisations, in which as an administrative member of staff, one is unable to fully explore possibilities and develop

capabilities due to an inability to shed the day-to-day operations of the organisation. (Maria, diary entry, 22/11/13)

There is a clear frustration here in the day-to-day rhythms overwriting longer term ambitions. Of these daily, routine rhythms, one of the repeating motifs of the diaries is the need to keep on top of email. Participants would doubtless recognise Agger's blunt assertion that 'The smartphone is the new factory, and emailing and messaging are the new labor process' (2011, 120). The difference being, of course, that you get paid for working in a factory. As Neil noted:

Still no budget for [name of project] but loads of e-mails and lots of people assuming I'm working on it. Many council officers seem to have a very funny understanding of time – they value it because of deadlines but not because of cost ... (Neil, diary entry, 29/11/13)

Neil's frustration here reflects a classic dilemma of those working project-to-project, with a fuzzy boundary between time that is paid for and investing unpaid time in trying to get a project funded. In this instance the emails generated by an as-yet-unfunded project can be seen as an example of time theft as the potential funder seeks to get time for free.

In the context of a local authority being required to make deep cuts to its budgets, attempts to capture more of its collaborators' time than is being paid for should be unsurprising. The standard 'clock time' discourse in response to this would be that email slavery captures individuals' personal time (cf. Nowotny 1994). What is significant here is the extent to which the lives of those in the creative economy are so dominated by work, even during 'leisure' hours (Banks 2009) that this time theft is not of personal time, but of potential work time – specifically the creative 'bit' of work time. As a result, these kinds of email activities are redefining what counts as work for many creative professionals. The emails have to be responded to lest potential project funding be lost, but the time they take is not being paid for. The potential funder, in Neil's case above the local authority, is enforcing a kind of dressage, demanding that the rhythms of the cultural producer be synced with its own, even if those rhythms come into conflict with those of more productive activities.

Lefebvre sees dressage as potentially productive, if constraining. We argue, however, that dressage is being used to impose damaging arrhythmias by placing multiple and contradictory demands on intermediaries' time. Anna, working in a small creative start-up, recorded a day where:

I worked on the final draft of the ACE [Arts Council England] application.

I also did some admin duties and emails as well as PR duties. I worked a shift at the café from 4.30 pm to midnight. (Anna, diary entry, 22/11/13)

Start-ups and freelancers are notorious for long working hours. The set of activities that Anna records here work to a series of different rhythms – the medium-term grant application versus the more immediate demands of responding to email (which will relate to both immediate and longer term issues) and of keeping the core revenue-generating café part of the business operating. Clearly one can worry about the physical health of individuals working very long hours (in this case around 60 hours a week). In some ways more concerning are the coping strategies employed by participants and the extent to which the rhythms of working necessary for more creative, less routine activity are being excised from the working day.

Rather than dressage being used to unleash creative and productive potential, then, the rhythms being imposed on our participants force them into undertaking a *recalibration* of their activities, constantly hustling to meet grant deadlines and complete immediate tasks, rather than thinking to the longer term. Unsurprisingly, given the current financial climate, securing funding was a major concern to our participants. Dave expressed his frustration that an academic collaborator had missed a key meeting, meaning that more time needed to be spent revising a grant application. Reflecting on this and another bid, Dave commented that

Both these projects are a priority to complete as soon as possible as there are other deadlines which will come into play in the next couple of weeks. To have these tasks done would be a relief. (Dave, diary entry, 12/11/13)

The issue is the extent to which these rhythms can be kept eurhythmic. There is a clear pressure to meet funding deadlines and an argument could be made that, like Simpson's street performers, the anxiety about lapsing into arrhythmia – missing deadlines, losing funding, losing work – motivates productivity. Instead what begins to emerge is a sense that funding deadlines were in fact *creating* arrhythmias, preventing the development of longer term creatively productive work. Maria, for example, was employed on two part-time contracts, dividing the working week between a university and a small arts organisation. Reflecting on her work at the university, she commented that

projects and deadlines ... tend to be annual rather than daily/ monthly, the rhythm of which will become more apparent the longer I am in post (although my post is only funded until July 2014). I suppose these annual project patterns are also reflective of the way the Cultural Engagement team is funded within the institution; funding is confirmed on a year-on-year basis, making it difficult to make strategic partnerships and plans that stretch beyond twelve months. (Maria, diary entry, 15/11/13)

Here Maria clearly identifies a contradiction between the university's short-term (annual) funding



rhythms and its stated goal to make long-term strategic links to cultural actors within the city. Responding to short-term rhythms, however, becomes a learned behaviour through repeated experience of the institution's demands. The result is almost perverse, arrhythmia being deliberately imposed through dressage.

This clash between creative processes and funding rhythms can be seen in the way that Sally talks about the administration of a grant:

HLF are a good funder, but also a very tight funder when it comes to monitoring. Every receipt has to be logged against certain cost coding etc. – very onerous as we work in a much more fluid way so there is a constant battle to assign and log receipts accordingly. (Sally, diary entry 19/11/13)

Sally's organisation has a lengthy track record of successfully delivering socially engaged and artistically edgy events. In this comment, however, you can see the tension between their 'fluid' way of working and the funders' demands for a routinised, bureaucratic processes. One can see a shift in emphasis toward the bureaucratic in some of the diary entries where there is almost a despairing quality at the failure to keep on top of the routine work:

The rest of the week has been a bit of a blur and I have not really had time to tie up loose ends before Sunday's event. I became aware early on in this week that I would only have an hour or so at my desk in this week which is not enough to feel on top of things and I could have done with organising my week differently. (Sara, diary entry, 17/11/13)

Here Sara seems distraught that the rhythms of running an actual creative event were *getting in the way* of the routine, desk-based work. Indeed, the dominance of the routine can also be seen to have impacted on how participants thought about their own practice. In the focus group reflecting on the diary keeping, Anna commented that she was surprised at how little she wrote about the actual event she was organising – the diary entries focused on email, bid writing and meetings rather than the creative output itself (focus group notes, 10 December 2013).

There is a sense that the creative elements of work are being forced down the priority list for our participants in favour of process and procedure. A cynical take on this came from Vanley, who parodied the process underpinning decisions to put on particular events:

'Oh, dear it's Black History Month coming around again, we have to do something [...] You know what I mean? It's like an after-thought. (Vanley Burke, audio interview 2012)

It is clear that the administrative and bureaucratic processes represent an insistent, overwhelming, *pounding* rhythm dominating activity in the sector, forcing

people toward reacting to the immediate rather than thinking through what they would like to achieve the longer term. Here Vanley suggests that, institutionally speaking, *visibly* responding to the disciplining annual rhythm of black history month is more important to funders than what those events might actually seek to *achieve* artistically and for communities. Of course, this reactive mode of working is not confined to the creative sector, but the key difference is that what it seeks to deliver relies on longer term incubation of ideas. In the current climate, creative practitioners are conditioned through dressage to either recalibrate their activities to fit the rhythms of routine work or to get out of the sector. The key issue is that this recalibration leaves much less room for the creative incubation on which the sector relies.

## Discussion: maximising creative production

Wealthy and powerful actors, both private and state, historically saw creative practice as something that money was spent on – commissioning a painting or a sculpture, giving salaries to composers to produce new works and so forth. Today, creativity has been reimagined as something that should directly or indirectly *make* money, indeed, being seen as the key to economic growth. Public funding for arts and cultural activities combines a desire to produce work that is aesthetically interesting, but with an emphasis on the instrumental value that creativity can bring in terms of social inclusion, upskilling and stimulating new (commercial) creative activity.

Discussing dressage, Lefebvre suggested that 'Creative activity, as distinct from productive activity, proceeds from the liberty and individuality that unfurl only in conditions that are external (to them)' (2004, 43). In separating creative and productive activity, Lefebvre reproduces a rather old-fashioned (and somewhat naïvely romantic) split between the aesthetic and the economic. The whole point of the creative and cultural industries as they have been conceived over the last 30 years or so is in privileging the idea that the creative *can* be economically productive. Thus Lefebvre's thinking on creative rhythms needs to be nuanced by looking at how creativity and production are being asked to work hand-in-hand.

In his analysis of the spatio-temporal qualities of capitalism, Castree (2009) focuses on the abstract power of clock time to co-construct capitalist space, quantifying temporal relations. Castree's argument is advanced here by pointing to the ways that the clock is merely *one* way in which capitalism uses time to control space and social relations. Where Gill (2013) talks about 'crunch time' now having become a permanent state for creative workers we can hear echoes of

Freeman's (2010) reflections on the way that certain ways of *performing* time have become normalised. For some, it now seems impossible to conceive different modes of living except for one where capitalistically productive work seeps into every space by occupying every moment of existence.

The fundamental problem being identified in this paper is that the rhythms of working increasingly being imposed on cultural intermediaries are not compatible with the rhythms of creative production. While many would be uncomfortable with the idea that creative activity exists primarily to drive further global growth, nonetheless, if one takes this instrumental purpose at face value then our research suggests that there is a key contradiction between a belief in the economic power of creativity and the imposition of an arrhythmic regime that crowds it out. Where the clock time disciplinary mechanism was highly productive (as well as exploitative) in the industrial age, the ways that rhythms have been used to discipline creative workers can be seen as both exploitative *and unproductive*.

The imposition of pathological arrhythmias not only damages the lives and wellbeing of creative workers, but is also counterproductive, resulting in routine work being privileged over (economically productive) creative work. The critical point here is that the kinds of rhythms being imposed on creative workers cannot be absorbed eurhythmically while maintaining those parts of the creative process that require longer term incubation. This has some parallels with Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003), who identify different types of time experienced by academics, noting that the 'timeless time' of creativity is frequently squeezed out to make room for more visible, calculable activities focused on outputs. To use a simile, this is akin to eating your seedcorn – keeping things going in the short term but damaging long-term productivity.

Where we do see attempts to shock the pathologised system out of its arrhythmia and into a more eurhythmic state it is where actors have considerable power and autonomy. Lefebvre saw the state as playing this role, but in our examples we have seen powerful individuals such as successful independent artists and those working at the chief executive level of large organisations being able to find ways of changing the rhythms of working. Of course, chief executives of large organisations are unlikely to be working 60 hours per week dealing with routine email and cleaning toilets in addition to undertaking longer term strategic and creative work. As a result, it is perhaps easier for individuals at this level to find ways of absorbing or deflecting rhythms that tend toward more reactive modes of working and potentially even having sufficient influence to reshape those rhythms toward something more eurhythmic.

In our analysis we have made a rather crude split between longer term and immediate demands, but of course these working rhythms are multiple and overlapping. Beyond powerful chief executives, our research indicates that the way funding for creative and cultural activity currently operates recalibrates the activities of workers in the sector toward the reactive. The creative sector is expending ever more energy on short-term responses to immediate demands – the rhythms of funding bodies, networking with potential collaborators, the practicalities of keeping businesses afloat and the constant call of email. Edensor argues that dressage contains 'scope for improvisation' (2012, 5) within the need to conform to external rhythms. We would agree with this, although with the caveat that this holds where the rhythms being imposed on the body can be absorbed eurhythmically.

Austerity has accelerated a tendency toward focusing on the immediate. Intermediaries are chasing a shrinking pot of money and are having to work harder to access funds; this privileges activities related to the administration of their businesses (grant writing, email, networking) at the expense of creative activity that actually seeks to engage wider communities with the creative economy. It is clear that our participants were also having to find room for externally imposed rhythms that would otherwise come into arrhythmic conflict with other rhythms that they embody. This is where we depart from Simpson's suggestion that the threat of arrhythmia can enhance the performance of activities. This may be true in terms of a short-term response – finishing a street performance before the rain falls in Simpson's case, or pulling out all the stops to get a grant submitted on time in the case of our participants. The danger is that in the longer term the threat of arrhythmia drives a decision to simply not attempt a given task. This means that people like Charlie were choosing to 'step away' from activities such as establishing arts networks that might only pay off indirectly and in the longer term (Charlie, diary entry, 10/11/13). As Anna put it, after receiving an offer to buy out the business, 'If we cannot survive off our artistic endeavours and the council doesn't want to subsidise our community work then we have to find other avenues of making a career and surviving financially' (Anna, diary entry, 6/12/13).

Thus we see the great irony of the contemporary creative economy. At the very moment it is being called on to deliver growth and social inclusion to counter the effects of austerity, intermediaries in the creative sector are now having to focus on the short-term rhythms of personal and professional survival. These working patterns are arrhythmic with the longer term rhythms of fostering creative activity to drive economic growth and deliver positive social change.

## Conclusion

If you feel lonely at work, organise a meeting (*trad.*).

The vast majority of people who read this paper will be academics for whom the pressure to react to immediate demands at the expense of longer term creative work will be depressingly familiar. In order to meet institutionally imposed rhythms of career progression and job security, it is all too easy for us to slip into reactive mode such as applying for grants because a call happens to have been issued rather than because of a genuine intellectual interest in the topic. Less visible, longer term creative activity is substituted for highly visible rhythms of email, meetings and deadlines. In order to manage impossible contradictory demands, we *recalibrate* our activities toward the routine and reactive.

We do not want to dwell here on time pressures and working conditions in the academic sector, important though these issues doubtless are (cf. the excellent contribution to this debate by Mountz *et al.* 2015). Although academics have many commonalities with those working in the arts and creative sector – increasing precarity, multiple and expanding responsibilities, an ever-growing emphasis on monitoring and performance evaluation<sup>3</sup> – our focus has been on those at the front line of attempts to bring the benefits of engagement with the cultural economy to wider communities. Clearly, it is no great revelation that creative workers are increasingly squeezed by neoliberal economic processes. The contribution here is to reflect on *how* that squeeze is constituted through the management of time and the paradox that this regulation of time is seeking to maximise productivity while in fact hindering it.

Our conceptual insights building on rhythmanalysis are key to understanding this paradox. Lefebvre identifies dressage as an important tool through which actors learn particular modes of behaviour, with a tendency to focus on its capacity to create ‘good’ or ‘creative’ rhythms. As we emphasise here, however, dressage also has tremendous destructive potential. The somewhat utopian idea that society should seek to pursue eurhythmic modes of living ignores the way in which damaging arrhythmias can be created and enforced through this dressage.

Taken on their own, these conceptual insights advancing Lefebvre’s ideas would perhaps only be of interest to a small group of scholars working within cultural geography. The significance of the paper is in how this conceptualisation allows us to unravel the processes of rhythmic regulation that are enforcing patterns of behaviour on creative workers that are harmful to both the productivity and wellbeing of individuals. The consequence of the arrhythmic patterns of working being imposed through dressage is that cultural intermediaries are *recalibrating* their activities.

In the pursuit of more eurhythmic ways of working, practitioners, particularly those without the power of a large institution behind them, must either spend less of their time on creative work (‘doing less with less’) or consider leaving the sector and taking their skills elsewhere, as so many have since 2008. Rhythmic discipline means, in effect, that cultural intermediaries are working harder but less productively in the medium and longer term.

This problem appears to be particularly acute at the point of intersection between creative workers and public-sector funders. As austerity has lingered, funders are becoming increasingly conservative and audit focused, trying to ensure the money they spend has maximum impact. The degree of oversight that this implies condemns creative professionals to a constant cycle of reacting to the latest demand from a shrinking pool of funders, rather than having the time to think through the wider strategic (and aesthetic) value of the work they want to undertake.

Clearly if growth is dependent on creativity – as creative city discourses loudly suggest – then this is a deeply problematic situation. Thus rhythmanalysis, far from being an abstract set of ideas, gives us critical insights into lost potential for economic growth and social inclusion that could be driven by the creative and cultural sectors but that is being hampered by the imposition of modes of working that create unsustainable, pathological arrhythmias. Notwithstanding Lefebvre’s rather romantic views about a separation between creativity and productivity, we can see that for the two to operate hand-in-hand to drive the creative economy, their rhythms must come into sync. Our examination of rhythms has highlighted the absurdity of a late modern capitalist system that champions the creative economy while simultaneously impeding its goals. There is a clear imperative here for public funders in particular to re-examine their modes of working and ask whether the outcomes they seek – social inclusion and growth – can be delivered through the rhythmic regimes they impose.

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## Notes

- 1 The scare quotes are his own.
- 2 We have anonymised all of the participant diaries but only some of the interviews. The interviews were all undertaken on the basis of gaining informed consent for non-

anonymised publication of the participant's words, but we have chosen to anonymise more personal stories.

- 3 Although for those lucky enough to secure a permanent post, academic salaries are substantially higher, generally speaking, than in the arts sector.

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